

PUBLIC HEALTH WORK

SOME EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

The growth which in recent years has taken place in some of the municipal, county, and state public health departments of the United States has been little less than remarkable. In California several examples of such special development may be observed. In a former number of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE, editorial comment was made on the growth and scope of the Los Angeles County Health Department.

The annual report of the health department of the city of Los Angeles for the last fiscal year has just come off the press in the form of an eight by eleven inches, ninety-page booklet. The budget appropriation for this department for the last fiscal year was \$740,657 (salaries, \$615,987; expense, \$110,510; and equipment, \$14,160). For the information of readers of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE who are interested, some excerpts are here reprinted.

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The first quotation is from the report of the city health officer, Dr. George Parrish:

Finances:

"The questions of taxation and high cost of government are doubtless of paramount importance to most citizens. Particularly are these questions of outstanding importance to the citizens of the city of Los Angeles, for they are obliged to support two major governments—the city and the county.

"This should be stopped. Steps should immediately be taken either for a unified government of the entire county or the city should secede and extend its own border so as to form a county itself, embracing the greater part of that district now known as the metropolitan area. Such a move would save millions of dollars annually to the citizens of Los Angeles City and do away with friction, red tape, incompetency, overlapping and duplication. . . .

"There is a complete dual government, but let us study the health departments.

"The citizens of Los Angeles under the present system of government are not only supporting their own city health agencies, but are contributing 60 cents on every dollar appropriated toward the maintenance of an expensive county health department. In other words, the city residents spend \$750,000 a year on their own health department and approximately an equal sum on the county health department, for the latter's budget is nearly twice as large as that of the city.

"At present the public is supporting two health officers, two sets of clerks, two sets of automobiles, two directors of tuberculosis, two chief sanitarians; two chief nurses, two chief quarantine inspectors, two main laboratories; they occupy two buildings and hold daily two complete sets of clinics.

"Unnecessary competition or rivalry frequently causes a great waste of funds. We have an example of this in our county where over \$500,000 has been spent within a few years for extravagant, expensive health centers.

"As a matter of fact, costly structures are not needed. The county has spent \$98,776 for a health center in Belvedere; \$55,000 in Compton; \$75,000 in Pomona; \$50,000 in San Fernando; \$80,000 in Santa Monica; \$100,000 in Alhambra, and many smaller sums. Los Angeles citizens contributed the major portion of the expense of these edifices, although they obtain no direct benefit.

"It is a fine thing for each small incorporated district to have situated on its main street a highly ornamental and expensive health building. The small town is to be congratulated on its wisdom, its foresight and its political sagacity, but it is a bad investment financially for everybody, but a good one politically. Health centers are necessary and do a fine work, when judiciously located and wisely managed. Unless great care is used, health centers easily and rapidly become branches of state medicine. They also may become financial burdens on a community.

"In Los Angeles City a much more economical, but equally effective method of reaching the people has been used. The function of a health department is prevention of disease and promotion of health. It is in the curative field only so far as it has to be—the hospitals are for that purpose. These facts are borne in mind throughout the city's program. Therefore, the city sees no excuse for the erection of showy health centers, furnished with costly equipment, necessitating an army of employees for their maintenance, in addition to a carrying charge of 9 per cent on the investment for interest, insurance, wear and tear.

"The city has twenty-four health centers conveniently located throughout the city. Six or eight-room bungalows are rented at \$50 a month which answer every purpose. These are nicely equipped. As population shifts, the lease expires and a new location is sought, for there is no top-heavy investment to prevent the health department following the poor. In pointing out these few economies, the city health department also wishes to emphasize some of its own weaknesses. It stands in need of improvement and better support. A central health department building is an immediate need. The use of the present building is but a makeshift and makeshifts are always expensive. Moreover, there is an urgent need for more personnel. Additional doctors are needed for a more vigorous toxin-antitoxin campaign to cut down the ravages of diphtheria; more conferences should be held to take care of the children; the volunteer physicians in the venereal clinics feel that they should receive some compensation. Some clerical help and a few additional nurses are necessary. Even with the additions, the per capita costs, now 59 cents, will still be far below that of all other large cities.

"The way to save money and do a bigger work is to consolidate. Combine all of the local health agencies and place them under one director. With practical management, the same standard as now maintained in the county and city could be continued and one-half million dollars annually saved to the taxpayers.

"I hereby respectfully submit the proposition for your consideration.

Educational Work:

"Through the medium of the press, bulletins and the radio, the department has kept the public well informed on all public activities and subjects which at the moment seemed to be of current interest. Through the courtesy of KMTR a broadcasting unit was installed in the office of the health officer. This has given us direct contact with the public and perhaps did much in the recent outbreak of infantile paralysis toward holding it to a minimum. The health commission and the health department are deeply thankful to the officials of KMTR. I also wish to take this occasion to thank the press boys in the City Hall for the generous support which they have on all occasions given to the health department. They have always been kind, courteous and reasonable, and without their assistance the health department could not have accomplished the work which it did.

"At the request of organizations, clubs, societies, schools and churches, the city health department was called upon to furnish many talks on public health of interest to these groups. Moreover, by means of divisional and generalized department gatherings, advanced lectures and instructions were imparted to the members of the department to insure their steady progress with modern advances in the field of public health.

"Transmitted herewith are the reports of the various divisions of the health department.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE PARRISH, M. D.,
Health Officer.

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Other excerpts from the reports of several chiefs of bureaus are as follows:

Population:

"The census just closed gives Los Angeles a population of 1,231,830. It is a fact worthy of special mention that out of this vast multitude there were only 181 deaths from the twelve quarantinable diseases. This speaks in eloquent terms of the good results obtained from toxin-antitoxin, typhoid and smallpox vaccine, Pasteur treatments, and of the efficient work done by the quarantine division. In 1926 there were 200 deaths from smallpox, but in the four years since then, there has been only one such death, which followed close upon the heels of the 200. This record is directly traceable to the intensive vaccination campaign. . . .

"A few remarks in connection with a number of these diseases will help to throw some light on the problem involved in their control.

Smallpox Increasing:

"There were 164 cases of this disease in the city this year, which is a decided increase over last year, when there were twenty-nine cases. There were no deaths either this year or last year. The cases are mild for the most part, but now is the time to start a vaccination campaign, for smallpox, unless curbed, will increase in the number of cases yearly and end in a burst of deadly virulence as it did in 1926. At that time 200 persons lost their lives, not a single one of whom was protected by vaccination. No one needs to have smallpox. It is a problem of the health department to educate the people to know this, and to overcome their indolence and indifference. The health department vaccinates free of charge. Vaccination is far cheaper than smallpox, for the city as well as for the individual.

Measles Epidemic:

"Epidemics of measles usually occur every two years. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 1927, Los Angeles had 11,033 cases with forty-one deaths. Most of the cases, as usual, occurred during the spring months. For some unknown reason, our present epidemic was delayed almost a year. There were 6378 cases reported this year, with exactly the same number of deaths as in 1927—forty-one. A little more than half as many cases but a higher death rate in proportion. This disease is particularly deadly in infants. Those over five years of age nearly always recover. The death rate, however, does not tell the whole story by any means, for sequelae are of common occurrence and measles gives a foothold to many other diseases.

Undulant Fever:

"Six cases and no deaths as against eight cases, no deaths last year. A milk-borne disease here traceable in every instance to drinking raw milk from untested herds. There is no danger from pasteurized milk, and

all certified dairies in California test their cows regularly. Do not drink unpasteurized milk (raw milk) unless it be from a certified herd.

Poliomyelitis (Infantile Paralysis):

"The city has just passed through an epidemic of infantile paralysis. There were eighty-four cases in June, 158 cases in July, eighty-four cases in August and fifty-three cases in September. When this epidemic first broke out it gave every indication of being a heavy one, but fine coöperation on the part of the public did much to prevent its spread. The doctors of this city, especially the pediatricians, met at frequent intervals with the doctors of the health department and nothing was left undone in order that infantile paralysis might be held to a minimum. The members of the Council gave special assistance, appropriating \$2500, which was spent in obtaining blood in order that a serum might be made which would prevent others from being paralyzed.

"The health department issued thousands of letters and bulletins and radio broadcasts, warning the people and urging them to use caution. It gave the public a history of infantile paralysis and how it was spread and treated. It kept no facts from the people, told only the truth and told that in such a manner that no one was alarmed. Pressure was brought to bear upon the health department from many sources to hide the facts or tell only a half truth. There are many persons in this community who place a dollar ahead of a human life. Such persons have little regard for facts or truth. The results accomplished by the health department justified its every action.

Epidemic Meningitis Proves Deadly:

"Eighty-two cases occurred with fifty-one deaths; this is a 10 per cent higher death rate than last year when there were 109 cases with sixty-four deaths.

"This disease is a most deadly one and the anti-meningococcic serum has not been entirely satisfactory. Epidemic meningitis is caused by many different strains of meningococci and the serum does not always contain the proper antibodies. The United States Government is seeking by experimenting in its laboratories to make the remedy more efficient by adding more different strains, or key strains. The communicable disease staff of the General Hospital reports that over a short period of time using cisternal puncture and treatment, they have reduced the mortality rate in cases treated from about 57 per cent to 37 per cent. A great deal depends on early diagnosis and hospitalization. It would appear that this disease is fast becoming endemic, or, at least, has declared its intent to stay—taken out its first citizenship papers. It has been quite prevalent throughout the large cities of the country. As with other diseases hard to control, the difficulty lies with the large number of healthy carriers who themselves never become ill, but pass it onto the susceptible ones.

Psittacosis (Parrot Fever):

"The fiscal year 1929-1930 witnessed an outbreak throughout the United States of psittacosis. This strange and rare malady attacked a total of 169 persons in various parts of the country, with a loss of thirty-three lives. Incidence was between November 23, 1929, and May 7, 1930.

"Only six cases occurred within the city of Los Angeles. All recovered. The source of their infection was traced to a consignment of South American parrots arriving on the steamship Los Angeles at San Pedro Harbor, December 8, 1929. Three additional cases, traced to the same source, occurred among the passengers of the ship after it had left San Pedro Harbor for Honolulu. Two of these cases, both citizens of Los Angeles, died at Honolulu."